

ON
CHOOSING
WHAT
CANNOT
BE CHOSEN



- on the recognition of a self that was never simply given

There is a moment—not chosen, not arrived at by deliberation—when the self is no longer able to remain what it has called itself.

It does not step outside and decide. It does not weigh alternatives on a clean surface and select. It is pressed from within by

something that has been pressing for a very long time, and which it did not know how to name, and which it had therefore called by other names: unease, incompleteness, the sensation of wearing a shape that does not fit.

And then—suddenly, or slowly, or suddenly after a long slowness—a name arrives.

Not a name it chose.

A name it became able to recognize.

This is the first difficulty.

Because recognition is not invention. But neither is it the simple unveiling of something fully formed and waiting. It is an event in the self: a moment in which what could not previously be seen becomes visible. Not because it was absent before, but because the self had not yet

become capable of seeing it.

So the question arrives, and with force:

How does one choose what one only comes to recognize? And if it appears as having always been there, what exactly has changed—and in whom?

The self chooses, so it says. It places itself before possibilities and calls this placing freedom.

But the field is not open; it is filtered.

It is shaped in advance by what the self can endure, what it has been taught to see, what has been named for it before it had language of its own. The selection is real. But the field from which it selects has already been narrowed by something that was never submitted to a vote.

For many years, the trans woman—let us say—surveyed a field that did not include her.

Not because she was absent from it.

Because the possibility was not yet available to her as a livable truth.

She chose, earnestly and repeatedly, from within a field that had quietly excluded the

most important thing. She made decisions, formed commitments, built a life. None of this was false. All of it was real.

And still it was organized around a misrecognition so total it could not recognize itself as one.

To live at the edge of an invisible limit is to take that limit for the shape of the world.

She did not know she was
choosing in the dark.
The dark was all she had.

And so she chose, by the only
light available—and the
choosing was real—and still it
was choosing within a
constraint she could not see
and had not set.

And what was done cannot
be undone.

Not because it was freely
willed,

but because it was lived.

Then the recognition comes.

It may arrive through a word,
an image, another person's
life glimpsed accidentally—
through something small that
suddenly makes the entire
previous structure visible as a
structure.

The walls do not fall.

But they become walls.

What was once taken for
solidity is now known as
enclosure.

And here the self divides.

The one who lived those
years was narrower, bound to
a configuration that could
not see beyond itself. The
one who recognizes is wider—
but arrives too late to have
chosen otherwise, too late to
have lived otherwise, too late
to have been otherwise.

“I could have known sooner.”

But this is misrelation.

The self that knows now is not the same self that acted then, and yet it is not another. It is the result of everything that was lived. It could not have existed before the living. It judges from a vantage point that did not yet exist.

To hold the earlier self in contempt for not having known is to demand that a person see in the dark with eyes that only formed in the process of leaving it.

And yet something has shifted.

Not because a hidden essence has been simply uncovered.

But because the self has become capable of

recognizing what it could not previously bear to see.

This is the vertigo:

it was not invented in the moment of recognition, and yet it did not exist as truth for the self before it was recognized.

What, then, are the intervening years?

Not false—they were lived.

Not authentic—they were
organized around a surface.
Not chosen—the field was
never open.

Not unchosen—she moved
within them with everything
she had.

They are not years to be
erased.

They are years that must be
carried differently.

The transition—which is also
not the right word, because it

suggests movement between two fixed points—is not an escape from a stable origin.

There is no stable origin.

There is only the self in its unrest, its misalignment, its inability to continue sustaining a shape that has become untenable.

From the outside, this movement is questioned:

Is it authentic? Is it chosen?
Could it be otherwise? Is it
necessity—or flight?

These questions presume a
position that does not exist: a
self standing outside its own
formation, surveying itself
from a neutral distance,
selecting an identity as one
selects an object.

But there is no such self.

There is only the relation in

its movement—a self that relates to itself, and which, in its misalignment, fails to coincide with itself.

The problem was not confusion.

The problem was a shape that could be inhabited, but not sustained without cost—
worn so long it began to feel inevitable.

What follows is not synthesis
in the comforting sense.

The contradictions do not
disappear.

The years do not resolve into
harmony.

What has been missed
cannot be unmissed.

What changes is the weight
of the contradiction.

It loses its tyranny.

It no longer interrupts every moment.

It no longer defines the entire horizon.

The self becomes capable of carrying what it cannot resolve.

This is not ease.

It is the cessation of a particular kind of war: the war of continually

correcting oneself toward a shape that never held.

Recognition does not produce abstract freedom. It produces something more immediate, more physical: relief.

The relief of no longer being fundamentally wrong about oneself in every moment of being.

But even here, the circle does not close.

The field has expanded, but it remains bounded.

The horizon has shifted, but it is not complete.

The self continues within necessity.

It will choose again.

Or rather: it will continue to move within the conditions of its choosing.

And again it will say: now I choose.

And again it will not know the full extent of what conditions that choosing.

So the question remains—but no longer as a problem to be solved.

Was it ever a choice?

Or was it always the self,

pressing against its own
limits,
becoming capable—slowly,
unevenly—
of recognizing what it could
not previously live with or live
without.

The recognition was not the
beginning.

It was the moment at which
the beginning became
possible.